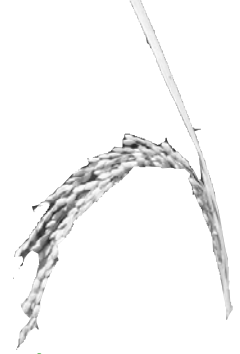


# Towards continuous prosperity

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Krishi Prayoga Pariwara (KPP), one of the Compas partners in India, has found that endogenous development requires an integrated village approach if it is to benefit the whole population. Water harvesting appeared to be an effective low-cost way to mobilise the population for the creation of nature-friendly village communities. But the shift to organic farming is more complicated, as small and marginal farmers cannot afford any reduction of yield and income. Recently a Karnataka State Policy document on organic farming has been accepted, and funds have become available for conversion to organic farming.



Walk for Water in the presence of spiritual leader Sri Raghaveshwara Bharathi Swamy in Hulegaru village.

In the early 1990s farmers in the small villages of Shimoga district in the Western Ghats of Karnataka State, southern India, faced many problems. These included poor availability and high price of inputs such as seeds, fertilisers and pesticides, as well as lack of proper roads and irrigation, transport and market facilities. They also experienced serious problems with the use of agro-chemicals. But to their surprise they discovered that many of their problems could be resolved either by themselves, or in collaboration with their neighbours.

## Krishi Prayoga Pariwara

To strengthen their collaboration a group of these farmers decided to start an informal organisation which they called *Krishi Prayoga Pariwara* (KPP), meaning 'family of experimenting farmers'. Under the capable leadership of Sri Purushothama Rao, an organic farmer in Thirthahalli, KPP flourished and the farmers had very encouraging

experiences with organic farming techniques. In 1996 KPP became a registered organisation whose main objective was to promote organic farming in the state. KPP has been a Compas partner since 1998.

During the past seven years KPP has provided training in the philosophy and practice of organic farming for interested farmers in selected villages. KPP also documents and disseminates many useful indigenous technologies in agriculture, animal husbandry as well as social and personal life of the farmers. KPP farmers stimulate on-farm experiments and have developed a few innovations based on indigenous technologies.

This has led to considerable change in the lives of the participating farmers. Most of them have reduced the use of agro-chemicals, and a few have fully shifted to organic farming. But, though KPP has many members, these developments did not bring about much change in the villages as a whole. Most of the

farmers associated with KPP have relatively large farms, and belong to the wealthier groups in the villages. The majority of farmers however are poor, own small farms, grow paddy as a major crop, and still use chemicals in their farming practice. To become meaningful to the whole population, KPP decided to work more on integrated village development, including all aspects of agriculture and rural life.

## Continuous prosperity

Hulegaru, a village in Sagara Taluk, was the first village interested in this proposal. Several farmers, who had been involved in earlier KPP programmes, took on the leadership. By building on the strengths of the village their aim was to transform the village from a state of increasing poverty and degradation into one of continuous prosperity and harmony. They were supported by the local spiritual leader, Sri Raghavaeshwara Bharathi, who has a vision of how rural people can prosper by caring for nature, thus creating social harmony, sustenance and self respect. He therefore named the initiative *Akshay Jeevana*, or 'life with continuous prosperity'.

KPP staff visited Hulegaru village every week to conduct meetings with the villagers. In mid 2004 a team of volunteers was formed, which started surveying each family in the village and collected general information on the village for a Community Diagnosis. Some results of this effort are presented in box 1. On the basis of this diagnosis it was decided to start development activities by addressing the water shortage.

## Walk for water

KPP staff conducted a training programme to increase the 'water literacy' of the volunteers. This programme focused on the reasons for water shortage and methods for rainwater harvest-

ing, water conservation, reduction in water consumption and prevention of water pollution. Based on the information gathered through this training programme, the village team planned a campaign. They first visited the farmers who had already had successful experiences with rainwater harvesting and water conservation, and then started to dig infiltration pits on their own farms, the school campus and community land. They also organised a procession

through Hulegaru village called *Jala Jatha*, or 'walk for water', to inform the villagers and convince them of the necessity of taking action. Since this took place, most of the villagers have dug a few infiltration pits in their own farm or backyard. These pits were able to store some of the rainfall of 2004, which helped to restore the ground water level considerably.

On the school campus the farmers worked collectively, digging over 200

infiltration pits of 6 x 2 x 1 ft on the 1-hectare field. They also constructed rainwater harvesting equipment on the roof of the school building. The students were involved in this initiative and are now maintaining the work done by the villagers. After observing this, the block educational officer of the government invited all teachers to visit this school, encouraging them to follow the good example.

People in Hulegaru also received

### Box 1. The Hulegaru village - some elements of a community diagnosis

Hulegaru is a small village in Sagara Taluk of Shimoga district. The total population is 563, divided into 120 families. 57 families belong to the Havyaka Brahmin caste community, 25 to the Vokkaliga caste community, 15 to the Shetty caste community and the others belong to Idiga scheduled tribes and castes. 68 families are marginal farmers (<2.5 acres), 15 are small farmers (between 2.5 to 5 acres) and 12 have bigger holdings (over 5 acres). 25 families are agricultural labourers.

The total geographical area is 868 acres: 330 common grazing land, 321 *soppina betta* (common land reserved for harvesting of green leaves for fodder and compost preparation), 66 forest, 107 private dry land mainly used for grazing, 75 areca plantations in the valleys, 55 wetlands for paddy cultivation, the local staple food. Most farmers depend on the local market for seed, fertiliser and pesticides but also for additional vegetables and grains.

#### Some problems identified

- Even though average yearly family income is around 55,000 rupees, nearly 25 per cent of the families earn less than 30,000 rupees (less than 1 USD per day per person, the indicator of extreme economic poverty). These families only have small loans and lead a very simple, humble life. There is a need to increase the income of the population, along with proper guidance for financial management so that their expenses can be reduced and outstanding loans cleared.
- The total cattle population is decreasing. For organic farming it is crucial that there are sufficient animal droppings for compost or manure preparation. It is therefore important that farmers increase their cattle herds again and improve their management.
- Many families face a water shortage during summer. As rainfall is sufficient, support for water conservation, rainwater harvesting, irrigation facilities and water management has been requested.
- Most common natural resources such as forest and grazing land are slowly degrading. This has serious consequences for soil, water and biodiversity conservation.
- Farmers have started to apply more and more fertiliser especially to paddy. Many of them are not aware of the bad effects of agro-chemicals on soil, water, air, ecological balance and food quality. The farmers have requested information regarding the ill effects of modern agriculture, the strengths of local traditional technologies, and the philosophy and techniques of eco-friendly agriculture.
- The lifestyles of villagers are changing. They are depending more and more on markets for their daily needs and are trapped in the vicious circle of debt and poverty. Traditional knowledge, skills, crop varieties, animal breeds and medicines are being lost.

Many of the villagers are aware of some of these problems and say that they are heading towards a downward spiral but have no alternatives.

#### Strengths of the village identified

The village also has important strengths, including:

1. Around 82 per cent of the population is literate.
2. There are 10 different local institutions created for different purposes; all of them co-operate for the welfare of the village.
3. Women participate more in the activities than men, consequently the involvement of the families is relatively high.
4. Most people are motivated by the local spiritual leader and work under his guidance for the welfare of the community.
5. There are good relations between the different communities that reside in the village.
6. The villagers still respect some of the traditional values, norms, beliefs and worldviews of the communities.
7. The villagers are aiming for an alternative to modern development, in order to improve their resource base, increase biodiversity and lessen the cost of cultivation.



Farmers of Hulegaru village involved in transplanting Amaranthus. An on-farm trial to determine the effect of cow urine spray on the growth of Amaranthus.



## Box 2 The Karnataka State Policy on Organic Farming

The Government of India and many State Governments understand the necessity to promote organic farming. In 2000 the Government of India launched the National Programme for Organic Production and Standards and Accreditation. The Government of Karnataka has also initiated action to promote organic farming.

As a first step the Karnataka State Policy on Organic Farming was formulated, accepted and published in 2004. The document stipulates the policy objectives and a set of strategies for promotion of organic farming in the state. These strategies include: the institutional set up of policy formulation, promotion, production and commercialisation of organic products, soil and water conservation, as well as credit facilities, research, and education.

*Apart from experiments and awareness programmes on organic farming, KPP released a book in the local Kannada language with 60 local paddy varieties in Sagara Taluk, their properties and use.*

education on how to use less water for bathing, doing the dishes and other daily uses, to use rainwater for home consumption during the rainy season, and to use natural products instead of industrially produced soaps and detergents. Farmers were told why it is necessary to respect the water balance, to pump no more ground water than can be stored in their land on yearly basis. People have become more conscious of water, and now refrain from using large quantities of water when not necessary.

### Organic village programme

In January 2004, KPP and all other persons and organisations working on organic farming were invited by the Minister of Agriculture of the Government of Karnataka to jointly formulate a policy on organic farming. KPP was asked to organise a two-day workshop for them at Sagara. Green Foundation, another Compas partner, considerably contributed to the draft policy drawn up at the workshop. This draft was submitted, and used as the basis for the present Karnataka State Policy on Organic Farming (see box 2).

At the beginning of 2005, the Department of Agriculture launched an Organic Village Programme. In this programme, one village in every district will be given support to convert 100 hectares of land to a fully organic system. Out of 27 districts KPP is in charge of two (Hulegaru in Shimoga and Kilara in Uttara Kannada district), and Green Foundation of one village.

Under the same name of Akshaya Jeevana - Life with continuous prosperity - KPP launched the project to convert both villages fully to organic farming. This made it possible for KPP to considerably increase its activities in

Hulegaru village. Since the water conservation programme, farmers have now been trained in organic farming, including improved biomass production, nutrient management, and organic pest and disease management.

### A conversion strategy

Conversion to organic farming on this large scale does not happen without support. Even though the marginal and small farmers are aware of the disadvantages of chemical farming, most of them are reluctant to adopt accept organic farming practices out of fear of lower yield and income. During the training, experienced organic farmers explained their approach and their farms were visited, but this was not enough to convince the participating farmers of the advantages of organic farming.

In response KPP staff developed a conversion strategy that would make it easier for marginal and small farmers to convert from chemical to organic farming. For converting farmers who only grow paddy for home consumption, KPP now guarantees their yield. For farmers who grow paddy for home consumption and sale, and who face yield reduction due to conversion, KPP will purchase their excess paddy at a higher price than the market price. In this way loss of income will be prevented. Some of the well-off farmers are prepared to bear the risk involved in conversion on their own.

This offer created sufficient confidence among the farmers. They have committed themselves to using organic manure and other organic practices during the coming season. This enables the participating farmers to gain time, to get a better feeling for how organic

farming performs in their own village and to improve their practices by further experimentation.

### The challenge

To secure continuous prosperity, as well as sustainability of the natural resource base, it is important that farmers convert to and continue with organic farming. To make it affordable, the farmers need to further develop their strategies to increase the overall performance of their organic farms and to commercialise their organic products. In this sense there is still a lot of work to do.

KPP also observed that adoption of organic farming not only depends on technological and economic performance, but also on the emotional attachment of farmers to mother earth and nature. The farmers who do not feel a sacred bond with the earth, nature, forest, water and the environment in general, do not easily adopt organic farming. Thus the challenge is also to better understand the farmers and together develop strategies to enhance organic farming. If this can be achieved, organic farming can become the foundation for a more nature-friendly and harmonious society in Karnataka State.

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